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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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"We should not look back to the New Left"

An interview with Dan La Botz

Matt Cavagrotti and Spencer A. Leonard

On September 26, 2019, Matt Cavagrotti and Spencer A. Leonard of the Platypus Affiliated Society conducted an interview via email with Dan La Botz, a longtime labor union activist and the author of A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work — And Win! *(1991),* Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union *(1991), and* What Went Wrong? the Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis *(2016). What follows is a transcript of their exchange.*

Spencer A. Leonard: Studying literature in graduate school at the University of California at San Diego you were "a teaching assistant to Fred Jameson, a student in classes of Herbert Marcuse, and a classmate at times of Angela Davis."[1] This was from 1969-71, as I understand it. How central was Marxism per se (as opposed to radicalism, anti-imperialism, the movement, etc.) to your concerns as a young graduate student? Had you already joined the Independent Socialist Clubs by then?

Dan La Botz: I and my classmates had all become interested in Marxism as a result of the social movements at the time — civil rights, anti-war, the United Farm Workers union, the women's movement — and because of our graduate courses in cultural theories. In our courses we read Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others, some of whom, like Sartre, argued that Marxism was the only philosophy of our era.

Some of my fellow students were more sympathetic toward Soviet Communism, some were Maoists, and there were a couple of Trotskyists on campus. I and others joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Then I went away for an academic year (1969-1970) to teach in the English Literature Department at Humboldt State College in Eureka, California. There my friend Walt Sheasby helped us form a local socialist collective, and then several of us joined the newly formed International Socialists (IS).

SL: What initially attracted you to the Independent Socialist, third camp position? Why that instead of some other brand of Trotskyism? How aware were you of the divisions within American Trotskyism at the time? How did the IS relate to the main divisions within SDS in the late 1960s, between the Worker-Student Alliance and the Revolutionary Youth Movement?

DLB: While in Eureka, I was initially attracted to the International Socialists after reading two pamphlets, Hal Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism* and Stan Weir's *New Era of Labor Revolt*. Draper presented the "third camp" view that capitalism and Communism (bureaucratic collectivism) were both enemies of socialism. That was expressed in the IS slogan, "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism." With the U.S. at war in Vietnam, the Soviet Union invading Czechoslovakia, and students and workers in France rising up against the government, that slogan seemed to sum up the world situation in 1968.

When I returned to San Diego, I was disappointed to find that my SDS chapter friends had joined the Progressive Labor Party (PL) and, having become Stalinist-Maoists (PL politics at the time), were leaving college to go into the working class. I knew next to nothing about the Revolutionary Youth Movement wing of SDS, except for the Weathermen, who had become famous for their violence. I and my wife meanwhile joined a study group of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the orthodox Trotskyist group of the era, and read some classic Trotskyist texts, though we were not attracted to the group. We already strongly identified with the politics of Draper and the IS. A couple of friends of mine at that time joined the Spartacist League, a split from the SWP, which, with its very sectarian style of attacking everyone else's politics, was not attractive to us at all.

Matt Cavagrotti: In 1971, you moved from the West Coast to Chicago to industrialize yourself as part of a wider IS strategy to build rank-and-file groups within the unions. How difficult was it for you to abandon a more intellectual life course?

DLB: When I joined the IS, the group was discussing the necessity of taking socialist ideas back into the working class from which such ideas had been largely excluded. I decided to go to Chicago because I had lived there as a child, and my father and his family were there. I thought that would offer some social support, though, in fact, it was not very significant. We had about twenty people in the Chicago IS, a few my age (about 25 years old) and several a little younger, who had been around SDS at the University of Chicago (about 22). I was committed to finding an industrial job in one of our priority industries — auto, steel, telephone, and trucking — but it took me a while. I worked first as a librarian, then as a social worker, and then, briefly, as a steelworker before finally getting a trucking job.

Going into industry meant a change in our intellectual focus from whatever we had studied in college or graduate school to a study of the union movement. We read many books on the American labor movement (Sid Lens's book *Left, Right, and Center*[2] was our Bible) as well as books on particular industries. In Chicago, one of our members, Ken B., created a reading list of books on American politics, race, and other issues. We also held discussions of events such as the May 1968 strikes in France and the "Hot Autumn" in Italy in 1969.

IS members tended to be people who read widely, though holding industrial jobs and being involved in both the IS and the union meant that we had less time for other intellectual or cultural pursuits. On the other hand, some of our organization's leading figures such as the longtime political activist Hal Draper, the historian Robert Brenner, and the leader of our labor work, Kim Moody, produced important internal papers, articles, and books that many of us read. We were at that time associated with the British group International Socialism (later the British Socialist Workers Party) led by Tony Cliff, so we also read all their excellent publications on subjects such as Eastern Europe.

MC: Was the rank-and-file strategy for building socialism a strategy specific to the late 1960s and 1970s? Or do you believe it is still the strategy to be pursued?

DLB: The rank-and-file strategy of the 1960s and 1970s remains important today because the labor bureaucracy continues to be a social caste that plays the role of restraining workers' struggles for justice. The labor bureaucrats, a social caste with material privileges and with its own worldview (the notion that it knows what is best for the workers), have not changed. The labor bureaucracy for the last fifty years has, in general, been allied with the employers, the Democratic Party, and the U.S. government. While the American economy has changed, there are still millions of industrial workers, service workers, and public employees who are union members, and one can establish rank-and-file groups among them. Today the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is attempting to do so. Some leaders of that project are former IS and Solidarity members.

MC: Many on the American Left, including prominent members of the DSA, have viewed the Communist Party's involvement in the industrial struggles of the 1930s and 40s as a high-water mark in U.S. working-class history. How did you and the IS see your activity in the 1970s in relation to that earlier history? Do you think the lessons that your tendency drew from the critique of the Communist Party in this period are in danger of being forgotten today?

DLB: We in the International Socialists certainly understood that the 1930s represented a critical period in American labor history and that Communist organizers had played an important role in that period, but we were never admirers of the Communist Party's politics, neither during the ultra-left and sectarian "Third Period" nor during the Popular Front. We looked back to the Communists of the era of the Trade Union Education League (TUEL) of the 1920s, as discussed in Kim Moody's various documents on the rank-and-file strategy.[3] We also looked to the model of the Trotskyists involved in the Minneapolis Teamsters union as described by Farrell Dobbs in *Teamster Rebellion* and his other book about the Teamster experience.

We knew quite well that the leading labor officials, such as John L. Lewis and, later, Phil Murphy, the Socialist Party, and the Communists had worked together to take leadership of the various industrial unions away from the rank and file. Lewis proved to be the dominant figure and the ultimate beneficiary. When criticized for hiring Communists, he replied rhetorically, "Who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?" Clinton S. Golden and Harold J. Ruttenberg had without embarrassment discussed the Socialists' role in suppressing the ranks in the United Steelworkers union. Those who had been good union organizers, they suggested, didn't always make good union leaders and negotiators, that is, partners with capital. Once Stalin had decided on the Popular Front — that is, an alliance of the Communists not only with other labor parties but also with capitalist parties — the Communist Party played a similar role.

I do think that it is problematic that some writers for *Jacobin* and some in DSA have not been sufficiently critical of the Communist Party, especially in the Popular Front period. Some of them do not understand Stalin's and the Soviet Union's control over the Communist parties, nor do they see the way in which the Popular Front subordinated the labor movement to the

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"Interview with Dan La Botz", cont. from page 1

those of us who are activists to enter the organizations, the movements, and the fray, and to make the arguments for workers' power.

SL: You note that, "Hal Draper, the longtime socialist activist who had been the intellectual leader at the center of the IS during its first couple of years, came to disagree with the IS's self-conception and organizational strategy. . . [thinking the IS] was on its way to becoming what he called a 'micro-sect.'" You then add, "Draper's resignation — the loss of our senior intellectual — was a serious blow to our young group. . . [though] Draper's position attracted few followers among our young members." Do you think that — whether Draper's course was the right way to go about it or not — more might have been done over the past half century to develop and maintain Marxism as a vital intellectual tradition? About Draper specifically, how do you view his decision to drop out of organized politics? Do you view it in the same way now as you did at the time?

DLB: Hal Draper had been our leading intellectual and political figure and inspired the International Socialists. Later, however, he came to believe that the IS, which had adopted what it considered to be a more Leninist conception of organization, was on the wrong track. He did not make a political fight but simply published a paper and left the group to become an independent Marxist scholar. Stan Weir, who remained our senior labor activist, made a tour of the IS throughout the country to urge us not to become demoralized by Draper's resignation. Draper's resignation did not really affect the organization, the size of its membership, or our political course. We could have used Draper's political guidance, but he went on to write a series of important and useful books on Marx as well as produce translations of his beloved Heine.

So, our problem — that is, the IS's problem — was that of the revolutionary Left in the United States at that time. The Left had become fragments, divided into many rival Maoist, Trotskyist, and New Left organizations and currents that tended to be extremely hostile to each other. Like others, we produced a newspaper *Workers Power*, and we published in the independent socialist journal *New Politics.* We organized public forums and discussed issues, but none of these made it possible to rise above the dominant Left organizations that were predominantly Maoist. Nor could we compete in the sphere of publications and public forums with the Socialist Workers Party.

Our view then was that our distinctive work in the labor unions, based on the "rank-and-file strategy" as defined by Kim Moody, would bring us success. On the basis of that success, we would gain influence not only in the labor movement, but also in the Left. When the revolutionary Left that had been created in the late 1960s collapsed in 1980, our organization continued to play a significant role in the unions, and we were active in some social movements, though we remained largely an isolated political group.

MC: You mention how in the 1970s, apart from union issues, "[The IS] turned away from most other topics, with the exception of work on African American criminal justice." You were catching perhaps the last great wave of American militancy. Looking back at it, what sort of opportunity was this for you as socialists? What more might have been made of it?

DLB: The IS turn to industry tended to cut us off from much of the political movement and debate of the era. On the other hand, almost all the social movements died in 1975 for different reasons. The Vietnam War ended at that time. The Civil Rights Movement's 1964 and 1965 legislative victories had been carried out in the South — an important victory. And there was the economic crisis of 1974–75, when, for the first time since the Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployment reached ten percent. That recession, and then the second recession in 1979–81, led to a profound downturn in labor strikes. So, while we may have missed some possibilities, the social and labor movements were dissipating. Certainly, from 1975 on, there was not much to relate to.

SL: Looking back over the politics of yourself and your father, whom you describe as also having been a third camp socialist, how do you draw up a balance sheet? Taking the collapse of the ISO as the end point, or the end of a postscript, what sort of lessons are there to learn from this now largely moribund tradition on the Left? Was the Stalinization of American socialism ever overcome?

DLB: What was called "Third Camp Socialism" from the late 1930s to the fall of the Soviet Union, we later referred to as "socialism from below." The concept was the same, that is, the notion that socialism cannot and will not be handed down from on high by either Social Democrats or the remaining Stalinist states (North Korea and Cuba), nor by various authoritarian governments or dictators, but will only come about as the result of the struggle from below by working people, the oppressed, and their allies. For me, this is the fundamental idea of socialism.

I don't see the tradition of the struggle for democracy and socialism as "moribund," since I think it lives among the Syrian revolutionaries now in exile, in the Left of the Hong Kong movement for democracy, and among the Yellow Vests in France. Often initially inchoate, socialism from below struggles to emerge, but it represents the only way to democratic socialism.

Social Democracy and Stalinism both had an impact on the American Left, though the latter was a more serious problem. Yet, in the United States, the great movements for social change of my generation were not controlled, and often not even much influenced, by the Communists. The Anti-Vietnam War Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Women's Movement all arose autonomously, and the Communists were never dominant, even in the anti-war movement. The American religious pacifist tradition played an important role, for example, in both of the first two movements mentioned. The task continues to be to advocate independent social views (that is independent of capitalism and Communism) to the movements and to the new socialist Left in America today, mostly in the Democratic Socialists of America.

MC: You have written that, "When its perspective collapsed, the IS splintered into three groups which became the IS, Workers Power, and the International Socialist Organization (ISO). The split was partly manufactured by Tony Cliff and the British Socialist Workers Party."[4] What do you mean by the collapse of the IS's perspective? And how was the split manufactured by the British SWP?

DLB: There were a number of different issues involved in the IS splits of 1978, some dealing with labor union strategies, some with international questions, and some with the relationship to the British SWP.

When I was a member of the IS, as I have discussed, we proposed a strategy of taking jobs in selected unionized workplaces. Our experience in auto, steel, telephone, and trucking was extremely varied, and we had different degrees of success in building the kind of rank-and-file movement we had envisaged. Where we had some success, we often found ourselves running for union office. Sometimes we did so with real support among the ranks, at other times we ran for office to build greater support among the ranks. That question, of running for union office, became the center of debate in our organization. Our comrades who later went into Workers Power and those who went into the ISO believed that running for office in the unions where there was no rank-and-file upheaval would lead inevitably to becoming part of the union bureaucracy and becoming more conservative. Those who went into the ISO went even further, arguing that any participation in the unions would be conservatizing in the opening of a new period that they referred to as "the downturn." So, when the ISO emerged from the IS split, they left working-class work for the college campuses where they could recruit. Those who remained in the IS defended the tactic of running for union office under diverse conditions, while appreciating the problem of the union bureaucracy as a conservatizing force.

There was also the question of the Portuguese Revolution of April 1974. We in the IS had supported the Revolutionary Workers Party-Revolutionary Brigades (PRP-BR) led by Maria Isabel Augusta Cortes do Carmo and the revolutionary military officers led by Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho. Both the British SWP and the IS supported the PRP-BR at the beginning. But when the British SWP withdrew its support because the PRP-BR failed to create a national newspaper, we in the IS continued to support them. We sent several of our leading members to Portugal and hosted some of the military officers to speak in the United States. The future leaders of the ISO (then still in the IS) supported the British position. So, this was another point of conflict.

The principal issue is that the British Socialist Workers Party led by Tony Cliff then provoked a split in the organization over both the issues of the Portuguese Revolution and over the labor union issues. The three groups that emerged from the split — IS, Workers Power, and the ISO — each had about 100 members. The group that became Workers Power and published *Against the Current* remained politically much closer to those of us in the IS, and that made it possible for us later to reunite in Solidarity in 1986, together with some refugees from the U.S. Socialist Workers Party led by Jack Barnes. Barnes, who had come to reject Trotskyism, turned his organization into a megaphone for Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party, while at the same time expelling piecemeal many longtime U.S. SWP leaders and members. Once outside the SWP, the expelled members found each other, formed several small groups, and then one of those groups joined with the IS and Workers Power to create Solidarity in 1986.

SL: How does Solidarity orient towards politics today? How much political and intellectual continuity is there between Solidarity today and the politics of Trotsky, Shachtman, Draper, and/or Stan Weir?

DLB: From its founding in 1986 until its last convention this past summer in Chicago, Solidarity saw itself as engaged in a holding action, working to regroup with others on the Left to create a socialist group that could hold on until the next social upsurge. Solidarity was from the beginning a multi-tendency organization and did not adopt a "democratic centralist" form of organization. Solidarity continued to work to build rank-and-file groups in the unions, to work with the social movements, and to support independent politics outside and to the left of the Democratic Party, usually working with the Green Party. Despite many efforts, regroupment with other leftists has proved impossible over the 35 years of the group's existence, and there was no significant turn toward independent political action by American voters.

The major different tendencies within Solidarity, what we might call the Shachtman-Draper and the Trotskyist tendencies, continued to exist alongside other members who had their own points of view. With the sudden upsurge of the DSA during the Bernie Sanders campaign of 2016, many Solidarity members joined. The DSA provided Solidarity members with a milieu in which to organize with thousands of young people, while Solidarity atrophied. At our last convention, we recognized that Solidarity could not continue as a left group and we voted to transform Solidarity into an educational center over the next two years.

MC: What was Solidarity's rationale in making this decision? Aren't the legacies of the Shachtman-Draper and Trotskyist tendencies that you mention at risk of being lost with the passing of your generation? Do you see this potential (further) breakdown of continuity with the past as an emancipation or a danger?

DLB: Solidarity did not so much make a decision as acquiesce to the reality of the appearance and growth of a new mass social movement in the form of DSA and the new New Left. Since Solidarity's members are activists and radicals committed to strategies that involve work within the movement and are not simply cynical social critics, our members — myself among the first — began to move into the DSA, because that was where the action was. I have no fear that the Third Camp ideas — anti-capitalist and anti-Communist (that is, anti-Stalinist) — will continue to exist and develop, because they conform to reality and are validated practically every day. They have an influence today among many young people and new activists. I do not see the Left in danger from a break in continuity, and I think the future will provide new opportunities for developing our political concepts and strategies.

MC: When you first encountered it, the organized working class in this country was far more independent of the Democratic Party than it is today. How specifically has this come to be? Do you see the formation of a socialist party in the United States as a goal to be aimed at? If not, why not? If so, what to your mind is the best way forward?

DLB: I disagree with the premise that the working class was far more independent of the Democratic Party than they are today. While the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s tended to move to the Left of the Democrats, we never produced a viable political alternative, despite experiments from the Peace and Freedom Party to *La Raza Unida* and the Puerto Rican Independence Party. And today there is a tremendous sense of alienation from the entire political system, both Republicans and Democrats, as manifest in the success of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, both of whom ran as outsiders.

I believe that the American working class will have to create its own political party if we are to move forward to socialism. At present, there is a debate in the pages of *Jacobin* and among DSA members about the relationship of socialists to the Democratic Party and how a socialist party might come about. This is a very important development, to have tens of thousands of young socialists trying to figure out how to escape from the trap of the political party system and of the Democratic Party.

MC: Do you think the labor strategies you attempted in the 1970s remain valid today?

DLB: I think that the rank-and-file strategy — that is organizing workers to turn their unions into fighting organizations to confront the employers and the government, which usually entails a fight against the higher levels of the union bureaucracy — remains essential. Only through workers' self-organization will it be possible to build class consciousness, confidence, and combativity. And even that won't be enough, because we must also organize the unorganized, and we must connect progressive social movements — feminist, environmental, LGBTQ, pro-immigrant, and internationalist — with the workers' movement. The strategies we pursued must be adapted to today's economic and political situation, but I believe they remain essential.

MC: What's your own position on these debates in *Jacobin* and amongst the DSA regarding the way forward for socialism?

DLB: It is good and useful that *Jacobin* and *Catalyst* have promoted discussions of how we get from capitalism to socialism, specifically how we get beyond the two-party electoral system, i.e. escape the Democratic Party and build an independent, working class, socialist party. While I do not agree with most of the positions presented that argue for a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism, the debate is good and brings out other more radical and revolutionary positions. I think most of *Jacobin*'s authors fail to understand the actual dynamic of revolutionary movements, where peaceful political processes such as elections alternate with riots, strikes, and revolts, such as Rosa Luxemburg described in her pamphlet on *The Mass Strike.* They also, it seems to me, fail to take into account that as the Left grows, the government will become more repressive, and that non-state actors, such as paramilitaries, will enter the picture on right and Left. I made some of these points in my review of *Jacobin* publisher Bhaskar Sunkara's book *The Socialist Manifesto*.[5] Still, the debate, limited as it has been until now, provokes thinking and discussion.

SL: It doesn't seem like we are closer to socialism today than we were one hundred years ago. Indeed, we are arguably much farther from it. Do you agree with this? If not, why not? If so, how would you at least begin to account for the failure of socialism in the 20th century? What, if anything, should socialists learn from the twentieth century and, more specifically, from the experience of the New Left?

DLB: We remain today far from the socialist revolution that we desire and that we believe is necessary for humanity. The October Revolution, because of both objective circumstances and some of the errors of the Bolshevik leadership, led to the rise of Stalinism and to the bureaucratic collectivist regimes in the Soviet Union and then in China and elsewhere. At the same time, the ability of the United States to revive European capitalism after the war provided the economic basis for the rise of Social Democracy in Western Europe. The entrenchment of both Stalinism and Social Democracy provided strong barriers to the rise of an independent Left, as did the Democratic Party and the limited social welfare state in the United States.

The New Left of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated the importance of constructing and participating in social movements, but it did not prove capable of building a strong national organization with socialist politics. And out of that New Left, or in and around it, emerged various Maoist and Trotskyist groups, which left an unfortunate legacy of Stalinist or quasi-Stalinist politics and sectarianism. If we are looking for inspirational and useful models today, we should not look back to the New Left, but rather look at the example of the Hong Kong democracy movement and the Yellow Vests in France. We need to revive the fierce militancy, critical outlook, and independence found in those movements today.

SL: But surely there was infinitely more debate and intellectual vitality in the New Left than there is in these movements today. Is the fierce militancy that you speak of really matched by the necessary critical outlook, the necessary historical consciousness?

DLB: I am surprised by the apparent pessimism suggested by some of your questions.

I believe that we are just at the beginning of the current new New Left, but that already there is tremendous political discussion in debate not only in DSA, but also among others on the far Left who might call themselves council communists or libertarian socialists, that is, anarchists. And that is true both in the United States and abroad. In France, the Yellow Vests have raised important political questions and debates. In Latin America, the rolling out of the Pink Tide and the rise of the far right has engendered new debates. In China, the Communist government's attempts to sinicize Tibet through colonization, its suppression of the Uyghurs, and especially the Hong Kong rebellion have also encouraged new arguments about theory and practice. Likewise, with the crisis of neoliberalism and the rise of the populist, authoritarian right and the looming threat of environmental catastrophe due to climate change. Everywhere, it is real changes in the world situation that drive people to attempt to understand and, in doing so, they go back to socialist analyses of other moments.

The actual threats, such as climate change, force people to develop theories and strategies to respond. I think that everywhere we see people trying to figure things out, many of whom have very critical outlooks and among them are those who bring a consciousness of history and know the history of class consciousness.

SL: What would you have said in, say, 1968 or 1978 if someone had told you that forty or fifty years on, Michael Harrington's politics would claim the most adherents from young people in America? Given that Harrington, too, came out of the Shachtmanite tradition, albeit that wing of it that was to the right of the Independent Socialist Clubs in the 1960s, what are the ironies here? How, in short, does the popularity and character of the contemporary DSA reveal and obscure the history you have lived through?

DLB: I am thrilled and delighted by the rise in America today of a mass organization with 50,000 members who call themselves socialists and that that is part of a broader cohort of millions of young people that polls indicate prefer socialism to capitalism. The DSA today does *not* have Michael Harrington's politics. It does not at present have a base in, and orientation toward, the labor bureaucracy, nor does not subordinate itself to the Democratic Party, even when it runs Democratic candidates, and it does not support Israel.

A series of interesting developments have made possible the growth of DSA and, beyond it, a New Left. First, of course, Occupy Wall Street, then Black Lives Matter, and today there are many protests nationally against Trump's racist and vicious immigration policies. Second, Bernie Sanders's idiosyncratic independence and integrity, which, while not even social democratic in the classic sense (he's actually closer to New Deal liberalism), nevertheless legitimated a discussion about socialism, offered the most progressive Democratic Party program in forty years or more, and inspired thousands of young people to become more critical of the system and more active. Third, the election of Donald Trump and his transformation from simply a reactionary businessman into a genuine right-wing authoritarian leader, has also greatly contributed to the making of today's Newest Left.

Those of us who value the socialism of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, that is socialism from below, should make it our goal to see that this Newest Left, through its experience, develops a perspective of workers' power and independent political action.**| P**

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1 Dan La Botz, "Why I Became a Third Camp Socialist, and What I've Done," available online at <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/04/17/why-i-became-third-camp-socialist-and-what-ive-done>
2 Sidney Lens, *Left, Right, and Center: Conflicting Forces in American Labor* (Hinsdale, IL: Henry Regnery, 1949).
3 See, for instance, Kim Moody's "The Rank and File Strategy: Building a Socialist Movement in the U.S." (A Solidarity Publication, 2000).
4 Dan La Botz, "Why I Became a Third Camp Socialist, and What I've Done"
5 Dan La Botz, "*The Socialist Manifesto* of Bhaskar Sunkara of *Jacobin*: Socialism Without Revolution" *New Politics*, available online at <https://newpol.org/the-socialist-manifesto-of-bhaskar-sunkara-of-jacobin-socialism-without-revolution/>

On 'exit' from capital

Gus Lake

WHEN CAPITALISM IS IDENTIFIED AS THE PRIMARY ILL facing society, the search for a time for it to be undone, exceeded or simply left behind, is inevitable.

Shoshana Zuboff's recent book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) contains many standout ideas, but one underlying anxiety is the search for an end, or exit, to capitalism. Nowhere is this clearer than when she writes:

> Surveillance capital creates a world of 'no exit' with profound implications for the human future at this new frontier of power.[1]

The idea of 'no exit' evokes a present that is both totalizing and enclosed, a kind of hall of mirrors found in classic horror films. Whichever way you turn, there is continuous multiplication, whether of space, objects or people. Without a potential escape, the critique of capitalism seems an argument without a conclusion.

But the form that this current conclusion has taken as 'exit' has some interesting connotations. The very concept of 'exit' is itself a quintessentially modern, late-capitalist one. One could argue that some of the ways it is spoken of hold echoes of messianic predictions of old. But the immediacy of 'exit' — as opposed to rapture, apocalypse, etc. — as well as the techno-material connotations are impossible to ignore. Just look at your nearest keyboard.

For our context then, what is the function of the idea of 'exit'?

One answer is that it is there for those of us uninterested in the idea of refusing the acceleration brought on by modern technology as a strategy for overcoming capitalism. Those of us who reject the idea of an oppositional Left committed to resisting the waves of technological advance as yet another harbinger of capitalist advance, King Canute style.

This critique of the modern Left has been most notoriously put forward by left accelerationists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in the *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* (MAP)[2] and later *Inventing the Future* in which they denounce "folk politics" that prefers "the flimsy and ephemeral 'authenticity' of communal immediacy."[3] For them, the modern Left evokes a version of the 60s mantra 'Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out.'

This rejection of a certain paleo-'exit' from capitalism is replaced by Srnicek and Williams with a promise of exit *through* capitalism. Technology is to be embraced and wielded for its liberatory potential. The danger in the formulation in MAP (which is well worth a read, along with the subsequent *Xenofeminist Manifesto* written by the Laboria Cuboniks collective[4]) is that the rejection of 'folk politics' easily slips into a rejection of politics all together. Seen as slow, laborious and restrictive, deliberative processes are understood to inevitably consign the Left to irrelevance in the face of turbo-boosted capitalist advance.

It is along these lines that one of the originators of accelerationism, Nick Land,[5] was recently asked about 'exit' from capitalism. His response, though definitely uninterested in the politics of anything resembling the Left, provides a thought-provoking alternative reading:

> Capital is nothing but pure exit.[6]

Land's contention here is that there is a transcendental error when talking about an 'exit' from capitalism. He is saying that you cannot exit from exit.

This does a couple of interesting things. By taking 'exit' as currently conceived, off the table Land in some ways responds to Efraim Carlebach's Marxist reading of both Land and Mark Fisher in a recent *Platypus Review* article. Carlebach is worth quoting at length. He highlights how both Land and Fisher in their work openly use Marx:

> ...Land quotes extensively from the famous passage in *The Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels describe how "[t]he bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part...The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations... revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society...All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned." Land simply comments: "If Marx and Engels had systematically substituted 'capitalism' for 'the bourgeoisie' in this passage, its accelerationist credentials would have been vastly upgraded."[7]

Carlebach points out that this essentially erases the role of the bourgeoisie in progressing society from feudal to capitalist forms (and on from there). Land and Fisher, and accelerationists of all stripes, replace a social relation, with all the dynamic tension that entails, with a machinic conception of capitalism driven by motor-fueled technology. The Landian contention in response then is that in some metaphysical sense we have reached a point where all attempts to 'exit' will be co-opted, usurped, and lead back to capital. As he says elsewhere in the same Hermitix interview quoted above, any competent attempt at 'exit' is "mushroom fertilizer for capital." Here we can see the power of the accelerationist position, as well as the reification that Carlebach rightly points out.

But what the accelerationist position also helpfully does is undercut a certain thrashing about for 'An Alternative' that has been seen on the Left. It is replaced with an even more finalistic, though potentially more freeing, assertion than Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* when he opened it with the words, "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."

Taking this in a more hopeful register, we can redirect our energy to something more productive. A response that says, 'right, so what shall we do now'.

To return to Zuboff, she demands our future *back*, our sovereignty *back*, our privacy *back*. If we look *ahead* instead, creativity, subversion and new freedoms have almost always come from a reclamation of the modern, a wielding of those technologies that are being used to control us. Srnicek and Williams agitated for "the recovery of the future as such." This is the right approach, the only way is through wielding the most advanced technologies for better ends.

Audre Lorde once famously said that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[8] It is a powerful statement, but what if the response (as I heard at a recent presentation from one of the authors of the *Xenofeminist Manifesto*) was something along the lines that, "those tools *can* dismantle and build new houses, indeed they must, they're the only tools we have."

The broader point is that, to put it provocatively, we need to cancel 'exit.' Dismantlement is not an option. Only wielding the tools we have, making new tools if needed, and building in the present can create a new future.**| P**

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1 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 21
2 <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>
3 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future*
4 <https://www.laboriacuboniks.net/>
5 There is a long-running flame war about Land, which is not unimportant, but I think it's pretty uncontroversial to say that his ideas need to be contended with, while rejecting many of his political positions. This isn't meant to sound blasé, I could enter into a discussion of how incidental or not the politics are to the analysis, but we'd never get to the point of this piece, you can read this blogpost for more informed content on those issues: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/why-is-nick-land-still-embraced-by-segments-of-the-british-art-and-theory-scenes/6329>.
6 Hermitix Podcast, "Accelerationism & Capitalism with Nick Land," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgEqQujsNTY&feature=youtu.be&t=1330>
7 Efraim Carlebach, "Forgetting Mark Fisher," *PR 115*, <https://platypus1917.org/2019/04/01/forgetting-mark-fisher/>
8 Audre Lorde is incredible in many other respects, not least her conception of hyphenated peoples. I do not want it to seem like her only contribution is this quote.

"Socialism and communism", cont. from page 2

informational and affective labor have today modified industrial wage labor to the point where "it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth."[21] The kind of emotional labor involved in customer service on the one hand, or mandated teamwork on the other, still remains individualized in its capitalist form. Employees require incentives to cooperate — workplace friendships are common (and commonly exploited) but cannot be expected.

Only when incentives give way to genuine mutual affirmation does alienation cease, and affective labor is performed between individuals or groups rather than presenting as an enforced addition to fundamentally antagonistic relations. Only then will "education, attitude, character, and 'prosocial' behavior" cease being seen as "the primary skills employees need" and become the fabric of genuine affective production.[22] The producer is thus not "incentivized," as she would be in capitalism, but she affirms the other in her work on a deeper, visceral, intimate level, across great distances or small.

Here, it is crucial to go even further. For if Marx is to be taken at his word, the affirmation of the other is "conscious" and is an affirmation of "a human need." These notions come close to those of recognition as described above: respect and esteem — the recognition of the other only inasmuch as they are human. This would exclude subhumans: animals, plants and artificial intelligences, not to mention potential leeways for other, racially or sexually delineated kinds of subhumans. But it only looks that way. Marx's concept is even richer. Far from recognizing the other as something, a fellow human, a fellow producer, a much more far-reaching economy is set in motion here.

> 3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love.[23]

Affirming the other in the product does not merely resolve into affirming the other merely as a consumer — a fellow human being with needs. Were this the case, the argument would end up in capitalism again, where objects are part of a general circulation. Affirming one object here affirms all of them, but under capitalism, such affirmation is alienated and thus results in a differential appraisal of objects as status symbols for conspicuous consumption.[24] In communist production, affirming objects is embedded in relations between producers approximating authenticity, and thus communism comes close to affirming objects in a non-alienated way. Indeed, the very notion of "object" ceases to apply.

It seems that, with the third element of communist production, Marx predominantly discusses the affirmation of producers by other producers in the process of production. Yet here, the static economy of recognizing each other as humans in a world of objects gives way to a dynamic process of affective affirmation. A producer affirms another producer in the process of producing. Yet the other producer is not static; their individuality, personality, and freedom, too, assert themselves in producing. This in turn can only be embedded in their own role as producing the other. The producer thus affirms the other as an unfolding entity. The producer affirms the other as a producer; which is to say, the producer affirms the other as affirming the other. The third other in turn is a producer, affirming the other in producing, and so on, rippling outward into eternity.

In communist production, therefore, the anonymity of the third entity, which occludes visions of the other as immediate other and renders her part of a faceless mass of third entities, does not arise. Each of us unfolds as producer of the other and thus immediately as producer of the producer of the other, and producer of the producer of the producer of the other, and so on. An infinite economy of affirmation unfolds as communist society, each and every day. As such, the first producer is always also the last producer, for the other produces the initial producer just as well. Affirmation never ceases to circulate. There is no reciprocity, but unfolding exuberance and exuberant unfolding. The producer is an essential part of the other inasmuch as the affirmation she gives is not just reciprocated but circulates through and beyond her, as she is affirmed, at once, as herself and as producing the other. Social relations of affirmation in communist production do not, therefore, resolve to economies of equality but rather resolve into affective more-than-economies of affirmation: each gives as they can, and each receives as they need, physically, emotionally, existentially.[25]

Marx's description of the affirmation of the other as "species," therefore, must be seen in the context of the affirmation of the other as exuberant unfolding, not vice versa. The other is never affirmed merely as the other individual, but rather as inexhaustible movement to-the-other-of-the-other. Communist production is not so much a production of objects but rather of others-towards-others; of gestures of love; of commitments of thought; of solidarity.

This extends to what capitalism treats as objects, too. First, it extends to animals which, in communist production, are produced as movements-to-the-other just as much as humans are. Thus, the animal is more than a companion or a set piece. It unfolds as exuberant affirmation in the social more-than-economy of exuberance; it, too, energizes and enjoys, saddens and suffers with us. Eventually, the term "animal" loses its meaning — an animal is in opposition to a human, after all. What remains is an unfolding, like us.

Likewise, "artificial intelligences" are produced, in communist production, only in that they are affirmed beyond recognition. Here, the legwork is at first conceptual, as capitalist recognition of "artificial intelligence" inevitably confines it to boundaries of inadequate ontological markers: humans, less-than-humans, more-than-humans; machines, more-than-machines, less-than-machines. Communism, by contrast, affirms them as unfolding more-than-others like ourselves.

The natural world, finally, loses its merely instrumental character in communist production. The first step here, as it is for "artificial intelligence" and "animals," is to abandon trite categorizations. Like the notion of "animal," that of "nature" portrays a passive realm in contradistinction to active humanity. Thus what was "nature" under capitalism, resource for exploitation and passive victim of climate crises, is affirmed in communist production as a realm of beings which, like producers, are beings-towards-others; affirming each other and us in an affective circulation of love and thought. Thus the entities which, under capitalist production, had been "humans" and "animals," "artificial intelligence" and "nature," come to affirm and be affirmed in the generalized ontological circulation of communist more-than-recognition:

> 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature.[26]

For us, then, communist production does not mean material abundance. It is quite evident that material abundance, or even the elevation of all human beings to the level of material consumption currently enjoyed in the Western world, is not ecologically sustainable and in any case is predicated upon the exploitation of non-Western Others, be these human, machinic, or animal. What communist production does promise, however, is a form of producing one another in social relations much more than in material goods. It is a production of each other outside of the state of war: as vulnerable, fragile, and finite beings in a vulnerable, fragile, and finite world.**| P**

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Socialism and communism in the age of climate strikes

Sascha Engel

ALTERNATIVES TO CAPITALISM, WHICH HAD LONG BEEN DORMANT after the collapse of the Soviet Union, are now everywhere enjoying a resurgence. Extinction rebellions, black blocs and cooperatives everywhere are on the ascent, resisting neoliberal attacks on the poor with as much vigor as they resist those on the environment. Congresswoman and social media darling Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders are not the only members of the American public to openly debate the merits of socialism. One can certainly doubt whether even the most generous health care reform can lay claim to the concept of 'socialism.' Nevertheless, the fact that lots of people all the way into the political mainstream are using the term presents an opportunity and opens terrain which a radical Left cannot afford to lose.

No climate strike achieves anything unless it is guided by the idea of a communist society. I make the case here that it is high time to set the record straight and to declare what socialism really is: a transition to communism. That is, socialism is not a discrete stage of economic development, as the Soviet Union had it and as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has it, but rather denotes only the transition towards a communist society. In turn, this means that it is necessary to discuss what such a communist society might look like. The time is ripe to take a stab at orienting ourselves to our goal.

Returning to Marx, again and again, is imperative: Marx's central problem is today's central problem. Everywhere capitalist production wreaks havoc on the environment, impoverishes workers, enslaves and starves humans and animals, and — for the lucky few — provides equal parts boredom and cruelty. If wasteful, unjust, and inhumane production is the central regime of capitalism, then ecological, just, and humane production will be the central achievement of communism. Socialism — if the concept is to be worth anything — and climate strikes — if their action is to be worth anything — must take up this idea of ecological, just, and humane production. The concept of "production" is, after all, one readily understood by anyone unwilling or unable to conceive of alternatives to capitalism. It can therefore serve as a starting point in the transition to "the only society in which the genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase" and where "the necessary solidarity of the free development of all" leads to "the universal character of the activity of individuals on the basis of the existing productive forces."[1]

"Planning" versus socialism

Above all, socialism has nothing to do with a planned economy. It would not even be necessary to combat this right-wing bogeyman if it were not for the unfortunate fact that even advocates of socialism often conflate the two. Thus in contemporary American debates about socialism, the latter is often characterized as "a system of completely marketless economic planning."[2] In the context of climate change, others advocate "the transformation of the entire economy, including transportation, industrial production, etc. through such planning" as will secure the future survival of humans and animals alike.[3] Such planning may well be driven by worker cooperatives, and indeed is envisioned to be democratic rather than bureaucratic — but it remains planning nonetheless. The history of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, seems to likewise confirm that socialism is essentially a planned state economy, from Stalin's five-year plans to Gorbachev's ill-fated at attempts at reform from above in *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*.

Nevertheless, a planned economy is by no means the essence of socialism. Indeed, it is not even a constitutive aspect of it. Socialism cannot be defined in terms of "planning, economic rationality, social justice, the 'logic of needs', etc."[4] If it is defined as such, as it was when "the decadent bureaucracies of the Soviet bloc" reinforced "the only kind of centralized planning they [could] conceive of" in the 1968 crackdown on Czech dissent, it inevitably has "to turn once again to the methods of capitalism."[5] A planned economy lapses back into a capitalist economy because its fundamental tenets — allocation of scarce resources, maximization of output, rational production — are those of the capitalist economy.[6]

Indeed, the Soviet Union is the best example of this. Well into the 1970s and 1980s, its attempts to compete against Western countries were predicated upon output increases achieved by the ever-more efficient allocation of scarce resources in centralized planning.[7] Amid this, alienation of workers from the means of production remained the case, only replacing these means' private ownership by ever-more distant state bureaucracies operating on the basis of supposedly scientific economic laws — the very same laws prevalent in capitalist countries.

As a radical Left goes about reappropriating the notion of socialism, it must unequivocally assert that socialism is nothing other than the movement towards communism. It is neither based on markets, nor a stage of economic development in its own right. There is no socialism except as continuous struggle towards communism; initially against the bourgeoisie and its state, then — perhaps — against the bureaucratic ossification of any previous vanguard. Socialism as a historical stage or mode of production is a fundamentally bourgeois concept.

Rather, socialism is the movement towards communism, the classless and stateless society where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[8] Communism is thus not a goal of socialism, to be achieved at some future point, but is present in socialism from its inception. Control of the means of production does not transition from private hands to the state, but is rather seized to be transformed altogether. Present forms of this, such as cooperatives, communes, or even unions, demonstrate that such a transformation is possible. Yet the current form these transformations take remains fundamentally capitalist as long as a vision of communism does not inform the socialist struggle. It is good, for example, that zero-hour workers unionize. Yet without a goal linked to a totally altered structure of production, unionization can become a tool of capitalist control of workers in a heartbeat — as indeed it has numerous times. Likewise, it is good that there are climate strikes. Yet without a totally different form of production, the climate strike, too, becomes another advertising ploy.

Why a Marxian concept?

But why a concept of production? And why a Marxian concept of production? Turning to Marx's concepts of production to inform one's vision of communism seems to be a bad idea all the more since Marx's belief in the subjugation of nature by machinery led, in some ways, to the cavalier recklessness with which Soviet development treated nature. Distributive justice, too, was in short supply in the Soviet Union. Yet, there is, as Derrida pointed out right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, more than one Marx.[9] Asserting that Soviet economic policy is a natural result of Marx's writing, and thus rejecting Marx along with the Soviet Union, is merely an ideological maneuver.

This is not to say that one can simply appropriate Marx's texts without reflection. Indeed, some have argued that a Marxist notion of production has become unable to provide useful critical concepts in today's "informational society." "Failing to conceive of a mode of social wealth other than that founded on labor and production," Jean Baudrillard wrote in 1975, "Marxism no longer furnishes in the long run a real alternative to capitalism."[10] For Baudrillard, Marx's critical potential remained dependent on the very notion of productivity so characteristic of capitalism. Other critics have argued that Marx's theoretical edifice is bound up in 19th-century notions of natural science and dominion over the natural world.[11] Yet others have moved away from notions of production and towards notions of informational dissemination to analyze the nooks and crannies of contemporary relations of power.[12]

Contemporary capitalist production is certainly, as these critics argue, embedded into relations of symbolic exchange and consumption which invite questioning of the specifically industrial character of Marx's notion of production. Yet this does not mean that production is no longer the dominant issue of contemporary capitalism. The "information age" has by no means rendered industrial production obsolete. From sweatshops and maquiladoras in globalized outsourced production chains, to the wastelands of Agbogbloshie, where electronic remains poison the ground water, unjust and ecocidal industrial production exceed "informational" consumption everywhere. The Western world has outsourced industrial toil and labor elsewhere, but it has not abolished it. Marx's critique of production continues to have its place. By the same token, a radically different vision of production continues to have its place in socialism: as focal point, incentive, and goal.

By thinking about communist production, a radical Left can provide concrete, direct and visible connections between the state of today and that of communism tomorrow. "Let us now picture to ourselves, by way of change, a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common... The total product of our community is a social product. One portion serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another portion is consumed by the members as means of subsistence..."[13] Beyond analysis of capitalism, this radically altered notion of production allows the projection of the society of tomorrow, while keeping the concrete connection with that of today necessary to guide practical struggles.

Communist production

In his comments on James Mill's *Elemens D'economie Politique*, written when he took up his study of political economy in earnest in 1844, Marx offers a few tantalizing glimpses of such a concept of production beyond that of the capitalist mode of production. As in the much more well-known "Economic and Philosophical manuscripts" of the same year, Marx contrasts in his comments on Mill a notion of production as capitalist profit with that of production alienating workers. Thus under capitalism, "my labour can appear in my object only [...] as the expression of my loss of self and of my powerlessness that is objective, sensuously perceptible, obvious and therefore put beyond all doubt."[14]

In contrast to this, Marx uses as his foil the concept of communist production which goes beyond any analytical concept he later developed, and which can serve as guidepost in socialism. I will first quote it here at length:

> Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have in two ways affirmed himself and the other person. 1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature.[15]

This notion can respond to both the critiques of the "mature" Marxist concept of production undertaken by Baudrillard, and the "actually existing" socialisms of Soviet satellites. It does not fall prey to the capitalist replacement of social relations with material things, and instead aims to affirm humans and animals, plants and artificial intelligences in the process of generating the material products necessary to live with some grace. I discuss the four elements Marx presents in turn.

> 1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt.[16]

This most elementary part of the concept of communist production describes the direct relation between the producing subject and the object produced. The producer finds herself manifest in what she produces. That is, she goes beyond looking upon it with the pride that comes with artisanal or do-it-yourself work. She rather comes to see it as a complete manifestation of herself in her labor: both process and product. Thus, this is not to be read as an advocacy of returning to artisanal manufacturing, as Marx has been misconstrued to do. Rather, both the production process and the product produced must affirm the producer.

That is, above all, the production process must make sense. This does not necessarily mean that every process of labor must make sense to everyone in itself. It must make sense, however, as part of a socially-affirmed and affirmative totality. Here, the question of what types of work are necessary can be consulted with gain. Even the least pleasant types of production, such as waste removal, can become a chance for the producer to affirm herself if they carry social recognition.

Still, the product itself must make at least some sense, too. It must be capable either to elicit recognition of the producer in itself — that is, it would have a direct relation to her life — or it must do so in a broader social context. Thus, even if communist production were to uphold the efficiency gains derived from local, regional, national, or even global divisions of labor, such divisions would have to rest upon solid social divisions of affirmation. Immediately, such affirmations can be recognitions. Where a producer is not recognized with love — say, because her product does not serve anyone in her immediate community — she can still be recognized with respect for her work, and at the very least with the social esteem of having contributed, however small that contribution might be.[17]

Thus, what is "visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt," as Marx put it, is not the product itself but the social relations into which it is embedded. These, in turn, do not become visible as they do under capitalism, as exploited and alienated productive relations. Rather, they come to be embedded into a social series of interactions: relations of recognition, respect, or esteem or, in more proximate settings, relations of personal intimacy, love, and free enjoyment of each other.

The first element of communist production thus immediately merges into the second.

> 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature.[18]

As in the first element of communist production, the producer affirms herself both in her product and in the process of producing it. In both cases, this affirmation is embedded into social relations of affirmation. As above, this works in two ways. First, the other is affirmed in the product produced. Communist production is production within a framework of knowing where products originate and where they are headed. Such chains of knowledgeable production are approximated, as much as is possible within capitalism, by attempts at "fair trade" supply chains.

Thus, the certification system set up by Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) aims to "support democratic producer organizations, provide premiums for social development, improve labor rights, and facilitate long-term trading relationships" between traders and consumers.[19] In practice, this is routinely thwarted by familiar tenets of present-day capitalist production, such as weak enforcement and oversight, as well as various more or less officially corrupt methods of shirking responsibility.[20] Nevertheless, one might make an argument akin to Marx's own point that practices possible within capitalist production may well allow more seamless transitions to communist production.

Imperfect though such an approximation might be, it does show that relations of affirmation across regional, national, and indeed global productive chains can be approached even within alienated relations of exploitation. Even if communist production were to retain such global productive chains — and there may be little reason to do so once races to the bottom of labor standards fall by the wayside — across them the other can be affirmed in the product more fully than would ever be possible than under capitalism.

Even more so, secondly, is it possible to affirm the other immediately, in the process of production itself. Transnational labor activism shows that, even under globally organized alienation and exploitation, solidarity between artificially divided workers in the First and Third Worlds can hold sway. While, as has been pointed out many times, a cooperative economy would mostly be local, globally organized connections are possible wherever necessary — and in the age of climate catastrophe, the necessity is both patently obvious and permanent. Face-to-face knowledge of one another, along with the social relations of affirmation which come with such intimate acquaintance, is thus not the only means of allowing producers to affirm not just each other's existence, but their personality and indeed their freedom, both in the products produced and in the productive process.

Affirming the other thus means, above all, affirming the needs of the other. Here, the notion of affirmation inherent in the communist notion of production goes beyond merely the recognition of the other. Recognizing the other entails love seemingly only on a face-to-face basis, with weaker notions of respect and esteem across further distances. Yet beyond this, affirming the other as a needful being entails the affirmation of the other's vulnerabilities; of their essential finitude in time and space; of their personality in all aspects. Cooperating with others in this deeper sense means affective cooperation. This, too, exists in rudimentary form under capitalism, from support groups to informal judgment-free zones and indeed mental health-oriented shitposting groups on social media. If this is possible in capitalism, then moving beyond mere recognition to richer affirmation is *a fortiori* possible in communism.

It is, however, only possible in communist production. Within capitalist production, cooperation remains subject to the fundamentally antagonistic character of individual wage labor. To be sure,

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Climate activists in Extinction Rebellion at symbolic Gallows. Munich, Germany 20 September 2019.